

SS. Sergius & Herman of Valaam
Russian Orthodox Chapel, Father
Gerasim's Cell

Monk's Lagoon
Spruce Island
Alaska

HABS No. AK-52B

HABS
AK,
12-MOLA,
1-B-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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Location: Less than .5 mile from shore, Monk's Lagoon, Spruce Island, near Kodiak Island, Alaska.

Significance: This monk's cell, still with original furnishings, serves as a vivid illustration of the apostolic life of Fr. Gerasim.

Description: This one-story, wood-framed building is clad with wood shingles and board-and-batten siding. The gable roof is covered with asphalt shingles. There is a shed-roofed addition and windbreak on the front.

On the interior, the plan is divided into a living room and bedroom, with the kitchen in the addition. The cabin is unoccupied but fully furnished, replete with icons and books.

History: Father Gerasim (1888-1966), a monk who devoted his life to the memory of Fr. Herman, built this building as his cell. Fr. Gerasim moved to Spruce Island in 1935, and lived here until 1965. Recalling a ca. 1960 visit to Spruce Island twenty years later, Abbot Herman wrote of his encounter with Father Gerasim:

His cell, which he built himself, had a little annex for his bedroom, where he conducted his prayer-rule, and a low closet for firewood near his stove. Everything was neat and orderly to perfection: freshly-painted and often swept floors, quilted rugs, lace curtains and a bedspread over a hard-board bed, and many inexpensive icons with a number of hanging lamps. I immediately recognized that this excessive tidiness was a means of keeping sanity in this intense loneliness and the overwhelming growth of the wilderness. The coziness was for the sake of warmth but not comfort, which is deadly for a Christian everywhere and always. (Rose, 12.)

The Ouzinkie villagers also claim to have built this building; Fr. Gerasim lived in Ouzinkie in the winter and held services there. (Parsells, 53)

Sources: Parsells, Father Yakov. "The Ouzinkie/Russian Orthodox Church." Orthodox Alaska 7 (July 1978): 52-55.

Fr. Seraphim Rose, "Father Gerasim: Guardian of St. Herman of Alaska." Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1983.

Historian: Alison K. Hoagland, HABS Historian, 1989.